AN EVALUATION OF INDIAN CINEMA'S CENSORSHIP AND ITS EFFECT ON WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The way women are portrayed in Indian film has always been a topic of discussion and analysis, especially in light of the censorship policies that control the sector. This study explores the intricate connection between the censoring practices in Indian film and the portrayal of women in its stories. Through a comprehensive evaluation of the historical context, prevailing censorship guidelines, and their impact on cinematic content, this study aims to elucidate the multifaceted dynamics shaping women's depiction on the silver screen. The paper begins by examining the evolution of censorship in Indian cinema, tracing its roots to colonial-era regulations and subsequent legislative frameworks. It explores how censorship laws have evolved over time, reflecting shifts in societal norms, political ideologies, and cultural sensitivities. Special attention is paid to the censorship guidelines laid down by statutory bodies such as the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) and their enforcement mechanisms.

Furthermore, the research delves into the specific ways in which censorship practices intersect with gender representation in Indian films. It analyzes the prevalent tropes and stereotypes surrounding female characters, including their objectification, marginalization, and perpetuation of gender roles. Moreover, this research investigates the implications of censorship on filmmakers' creative freedom and the industry's ability to challenge societal norms and promote gender equality. In conclusion, this research underscores the significant role played by censorship practices in shaping women's representation in Indian cinema. By shedding light on the interplay between censorship, gender dynamics, and cinematic narratives, it advocates for a nuanced approach to censorship that fosters inclusivity, diversity, and the empowerment of women in the realm of filmmaking.

Keywords: cinema, censorship, women, regulation, gender, etc.

[A] INTRODUCTION

Cinema is an artistic expression of ideas, stories and often opinions, sometimes inspired by reality occasionally set to music, designed to enthral, enchant, or simply to entertain[1]. The art of vibrant moving pictures is known as cinema, or motion picture[2]. Ever since its conception, film has been a crucial medium for the expression of ideas. It is a little representation of the norms and values of the society. It has been a vehicle for revolution and change, a wellspring of ideas and ideals. It offers a forum where people in the community may reflect and work towards constructive change.

The mainstream Indian film industry, which began in 1913, has played a vital role in the sociocultural modernization of caste-ridden, impoverished, and mostly illiterate feudal Indian culture. In popular Hindi movies, the way women are portrayed has changed dramatically. Women have been portrayed in Indian film in a variety of ways over the years.

Indian film acts as a mirror, reflecting the nation's prevailing socioeconomic norms, values, and prejudices. The way women are portrayed in Indian cinema and the laws controlling censorship have been closely examined and discussed.

Indian cinema's representation of women often mirrors deeply ingrained patriarchal conventions and gender stereotypes. Often, female characters are reduced to clichéd stereotypes like the devoted wife, the selfless mother, or the alluring tempter. Such constrained and stereotyped portrayals reinforce detrimental cultural views towards women in addition to perpetuating gender inequity.

In Indian film, censorship policies have a big impact on how women are portrayed. Films that explore themes of female sexuality and agency or have strong, autonomous female protagonists are often subject to strict censoring, which dilutes or suppresses the intended message. In addition to impeding artistic freedom, this suppression of creative expression also upholds outdated gender stereotypes.

[B] SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

[1] George Washington, National Gazette, http://www.mountvernon.o Feb 12, 2016.rg/digital-encyclopedia/article/national-gazette/ (19 January, 2024, 08:00 pm).

[2] Gabe Moura, What's Cinema, Elements of Cinema, www.elementsofcinema.com/cinema/definition-and-brief-history, (January 28, 2024, 07:00 pm).

This research highlights the socio-cultural implications of the complex relationship between censorship laws and how women are portrayed in Indian movies. This study helps to our knowledge of the larger concerns of gender inequality and cultural hegemony in the film industry by analyzing the effects of censoring on women's portrayal. The study's conclusions shed light on the difficulties encountered by directors and the restrictions placed on creative expression, especially with regard to the portrayal of female characters. This study highlights the significance of promoting inclusive and empowering storylines that challenge traditional images of women in Indian film via a detailed examination of censoring procedures.

[C] RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the perspectives of filmmakers, film critics, and industry stakeholders on the role of censorship in shaping women's representation in Indian cinema.
2. To analyze the historical evolution of censorship practices in Indian cinema and their correlation with the portrayal of women over different time periods.
3. To assess the impact of censorship guidelines, as enforced by bodies like the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), on the representation of women in Indian films.
4. To delve into the prevalence of gender stereotypes and tropes in Indian cinema, particularly concerning female characters, and their relationship with censorship decisions.

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[D] RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have censorship methods changed over time in Indian cinema, and what particular laws affect how women are portrayed in films?
2. What are the common tropes and prejudices that are connected to female characters in Indian film, and how much do censoring procedures support or contradict these depictions?
3. When portraying women in their films, how do directors get around censorship restrictions and what are some of the tactics they use to get past regulatory scrutiny?
4. What effect does censorship seem to have on filmmakers' freedom of expression, especially when it pertains to how women are portrayed, and how does it influence stories in movies?
5. What effects do censoring choices have on promoting gender equality and dispelling gender stereotypes in Indian film, and how much do they conform to social conventions when it comes to women's representation?

[E] LITERATURE REVIEW

The Indian film industry observed its 'Golden Age; what really distinguishes the new Indian cinema is a definitive set of liberal-humanitarian values, embracing progressive submission to urgent problems, sensitivity to the plight of the poor and oppressed. Drawing its inspiration largely from the neo-realists, it is the cinema of social significance and artistic sincerity (Raina, 1981)[3].

It is crucial to note at this point that the first Hindi film to open with the idea that Jaya Bachhan, the wife, is more accomplished than her husband, Amitabh Bachhan, is the 1971 film "Abhiman." Indian ladies have been greatly impacted by this film. During this time, women were also shown in more aggressive roles. Examples of these roles are those of Jaya Bachhan, who worked as a knife sharpener in Janzeer, Hema Malini, a horse carriage driver in Sholay, Rakhi, a company secretary in Trishul, and a doctor in Kala Pathar. This trend, which Wood referred to as the "Indian New Wave," led to a surge of realism in Hindi film in the 1980s (Wood, 2000).

The drama queen Halen by her plot-driven songs with vulgarity, transformed the texture of earlier movies of 1950s and also of before that. Songs such as Piya tu ab to aa ja (Carvan 1971).

So far the representation of women in Indian cinema is concerned, it is to be stated that Film scholar and author Soma Chatterjee in her book 'Cinema, object: Women 1998' says, "Women in Indian Hindi cinema have been decorative objects with rarely any sense of agency being imparted to them. Each phase of Hindi cinema had its own representation of women, but they were confined largely to the traditional patriarchal framework of Indian society. The ordinary women have hardly been visible in Hindi cinema".

Ranjani Mazumdar illustrates her metioulous work on the design of the cinematic frame that includes multiple urban spaces in the performance with the voyeuristic pleasure of lead heroines like Raveena Tandon in the song Saher Ki Ladki (Rakshak, 1995) or Karishma Kapoor in the song, Sona Kitna Sona Hai (Hero, 1997) shot in India and abroad (Mazumdar, 2005)[4].

[F] RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

[3] Raina, R., Foreword., in The New Generation, 1960-1980, Film India 1981(1981) P5.
[4] Mazumdar, Ranjani., Bombay Cinema, London, Minneapolis: University of Minneasota Press, (2005) P90.

The methodology suggested shall be basically a comprehensive methodology. A combination of qualitative research methods, including film analysis, textual analysis, and content analysis, has been used to examine a wide range of films from different eras of Indian cinema. Doctrinal method shall be adopted to explore the objectives of the research. The study is predominantly based on Indian Cinema, women's reservation and cinema's censorship. The relevant legislations and statutory instruments which are in force in India and other jurisdictions shall also be thoroughly examined. The study incorporates both primary and secondary sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of women representation in Indian cinema. Adapting the method of doctrinal research legal concepts and principles shall be examined and analyzed to reach the conclusion.

[G] HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A lively domain of art arose in the magical continent of India, wrapped in the ethereal embrace of time.

Indian cinema, a dance of light and shadow, started its magnificent voyage through the years and has since left a lasting impression on the cultural fabric. It revealed stories that reflected the hopes, tragedies, and pleasures of society, much like a divine storyteller. Through this cinematic adventure, topics, genres, and methods have evolved from the luminous black-and-white period to the brilliant colours of today. Indian cinema, with its varied stories and impassioned performances, has emerged as a lighthouse, touching people's hearts and minds, breaking down barriers, and connecting with viewers everywhere.

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Initial years: Dawn of Indian Cinema

This section traces the beginnings and evolution of Indian film, giving a broad overview of its early years. When discussing the origins of Indian cinema, the impact of international film is highlighted, especially in light of the Lumière brothers' creation of the motion picture camera. In Indian cinema history, a major turning point was the appearance of pioneers like Dadasaheb Phalke, who helmed the country's first feature film, "Raja Harishchandra" (1913). In order to provide the groundwork for further advancements, this section examines the themes, storylines, and depiction of women in the early years.

Progressive Themes and Women-Centric Films: Golden Age

During the 1940s to 1960s, which is considered the Golden Age of Indian film, there was a notable change in the stories and how women were portrayed. The progressive ideas and women-focused films that surfaced during this time are examined in this section. Strong female characters were shown in films like "Mother India" (1957) and "Bandini" (1963), which also examined the agency, independence, and resiliency of women. An analysis is conducted on the contributions made by filmmakers who depicted women in intricate and subtle ways, such as Bimal Roy, Mehboob Khan, and Guru Dutt. This time frame is significant for how women are portrayed in Indian film and for the development of feminist ideas.

Parallel Cinema: Dispelling Preconceptions

Parallel cinema, also referred to as art cinema or new wave cinema, first appeared in opposition to Bollywood films that were popular in the 1970s and 1980s. This section explores the films of filmmakers who questioned traditional norms and provided alternative narratives, such as Govind Nihalani, Satyajit Ray, and Shamm Benegal. Female characters in alternative film often defied the stereotypical roles that are traditionally associated with women in mainstream cinema by being strong, independent, and outspoken. A thorough analysis is conducted on the impact of parallel film on feminist discourse and the portrayal of women in Indian cinema.

Bollywood in the Modern Era: Business Achievements and Difficulties

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Bollywood's modern period, which spans the 1990s and is marked by worldwide trends and economic success, is characterised by its impact. This section examines the portrayal of women in popular Bollywood films, noting advancements as well as ongoing difficulties. The development of the "female lead" stereotype, how female sexuality is portrayed, and the effects of objectification and item numbers are all looked at. There is discussion of the contributions made by directors who have tried to subvert conventional storylines and strengthen female characters, such as Zoya Akhtar, Anurag Kashyap, and Farhan Akhtar. An outline of the present situation and the prospects for feminist themes in modern Bollywood finishes this section.

A thorough grasp of the development and evolution of Indian film throughout the years may be gained from the historical overview of the genre. We learn about the evolving themes and depiction of women by looking at the early years, the Golden Age, the emergence of alternative film, and

the current state of Bollywood. This information serves as the foundation for further investigation into feminist themes in Indian film and how they affect attitudes and views in society.

The portrayal of women in Indian cinema, the development of feminist themes, important directors and their contributions, the impact and reception of feminist films, the difficulties and controversies that feminist cinema has faced, the intersectionality of feminist narratives, and the role of feminism in social change are all covered in more detail in the following sections of this thesis.

[H] LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CINEMA IN INDIA

One of the most sacred rights protected by the Indian Constitution is the freedom of speech and expression. It's the idea of having unrestricted speech. It is often seen as a fundamental idea in contemporary liberal democracies[5]. According to Article 19(1)(a) of Part III of the Constitution, every citizen is entitled to the freedom of speech and expression[6].

It is well acknowledged that film, as a means of expressing ideas, is interpreted in accordance with the protections granted by Article 19(1)(a). On the other hand, Article 19(2) establishes appropriate limitations on the freedom that Article 19(1)(a) guarantees. Reasonable limitations on these rights may be imposed in relation to the following: public order, decency or morality; security of the State; friendly relations with foreign States; India's sovereignty and integrity; or in relation to contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to an offence[7].

The same limitations are outlined in the Cinematograph Act, which establishes standards for the process of certifying films. Entry 60 of the Union List of the VII Schedule grants the Union Parliament regulatory authority over the film industry. Entry 33 of the State List grants the states limited authority over the regulation of motion pictures. The Cinematograph Act of 1952 governs cinema in India. The Act establishes regulations on the use of cinematographs for exhibition and the certification of films for such purposes[8].

[5] Subhradipta Sarkar et al., Banning Films or Article 19(1)(a), Legal Services India, http://www.legalserviceindia.com/articles/fban.htm (January 19, 2024, 08 :33 pm).
[6] The Constitution of India, 1949.
[7] Article 19(2), Ibid.
[8] The Cinematograph Act, 1952.

A Central Board of Film Certification is a regulatory organization established by Section 3 of the Act, whose main responsibility is to certify films for public display. Section 4 of the Act grants the Board, which functions as a subsidiary body under the Ministry of Information Broadcasting, broad authority to control the showing of motion pictures.

[I] EFFECT OF CINEMA'S CENSORSHIP ON WOMEN'S RESERVATION

The 1990s saw the emergence of globalisation trends and the interconnectivity of nations and continents in the areas of education, trade, business, media and culture, and information technology. These developments had a significant impact on the film industry as well as on the movement of people and goods across national borders.

These advancements, along with people's changes in perspective, standard of living, way of thinking, eating habits, clothing choices, and connectivity to the outside world through the internet—Facebook, Google, etc.—have altered people's likes and dislikes and behaviour patterns, which have played a significant role in upending the conventional filmmaking route.

Consequently, as Ranjani Mazumdar demonstrates her meticulous work on the design of the cinematic frame that incorporates several urban spaces in the performance with the voyeuristic pleasure of lead heroines such as Karishma Kapoor in the song Sona Kitna Sona Hai (Hero, 1997), which was shot both in India and overseas, or Raveena Tandon in the song Saher Ki Ladki (Rakshak, 1995)[9]. The family drama gained popularity in the 1990s. The patriarchal idea of Indian society was supported by the majority of the films, which went on to become blockbusters.

Family connection fosters qualities like love, caring, discipline, obedience, etc. Kajol in Kuchh Kuchh Hota Hai, Madhuri Dikshit in Hum Apke Hain Kaun and Dil to Pagal Hai, Jaya Bachhan in Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham, etc. (Shendurnikar, 2012)[10].

Following the advent of globalisation and liberalisation in the 1990s, mainstream Hindi film saw structural and stylistic changes. According to Vasudevan, several genres that emerged in the 1990s

[9] Mazumdar, Ranjani., Bombay Cinema, London, Minneapolis: University of Minneasota Press,(2005) P90.
[10] Shendurnikar, Nidhi., Gender Reflections in Mainstream Hindi Cinema, Global Media Journal, University of Calcutta (2012).

and after 2000—like the gangster genre—have mostly gained financial success in the Bollywood sector (Vasudevan, 2010)[11]. The item songs as a category found context in the gangster genre.

The item girls use their imagination to express themselves via their act. They exhibit obscene, filthy, and bawdy body imagery, and they often take advantage of "androgynous" times in spoken discourses by flaunting their hips and full busts (Kaur, 2011)[12] in order to draw attention from onlookers.

Not only do item females like Mallaika Arora, Mallika Sherawat, and Sunny Leone sing the item songs, but high-status heroines do as well. Aishwarya Rai, Kajrare, Kajrare (Bunty or Bubli, 2005), Kareena Kapoor, Yeh Mera Dil Fevicol Se (Dabang-2, 2012), Urmila Mantongkar, Chamma, Chammma (China Gate, 1998), Katrina Kaif, Shila Ki Jawani (Teesmar Khan, 2010), and Madhuri Dixit, a well-known actress from the cult song "Choli Ke Pichhe Kya Hai (Khalnayak, 1993), Katrina Kaif, Shila Ki Jawani (Teesmar Khan, 2010), provide ample testimony to the fact that the heroine has also demonstrated their performance as item girls like the professional item girls.

In this approach, it is discovered that the portrayal of women in mainstream Hindi cinema has changed over the course of Indian film history in terms of character, imagery, performance, and representation. One thing that has caught our attention is the fact that women are now represented in Hindi film. Women in Indian society have been impacted in a similar way by their increased involvement in mainstream film, their leading role performances, and their audacity in those performances.

Films are restricted in many nations to check for differing degrees of social and political content that can be seen as upsetting by viewers. Common elements that are subject to censorship include violence, sexual material, harsh language, drug usage, abusive content, revolutionary content, and abuses of human rights.

[11] Vasudevan, Ravi. S., The Exhiliration of Dread: Genre, Narrative Form and Film Style in Contemporary urban Action Films, in city Flicks: Indian cinema and the urban experience, ed Preben Karsholm, Calcutta: Seagull Books (2010).

[12] Kaur, Ravneet., Framing the Body and the Body of Frame: Items songs in popular Hindi cinema, ACTA, ORIENTALIA VILNENSI, (2011).

The Cinematograph Act of 1952[13] severely restricts the extent of censorship in India. The Act gives the Board no authority to limit the release of motion pictures in excess of the particular guidelines set out in section 5(B) of the Act[14] and on the basis of reasonable restriction.

The Board may request that the applicant examine and amend the complained portion of the film only in the event that the motion picture or any part of the motion picture violates section 5(B) of the Act[15].

Unfortunately, the CBFC has often abused the authority bestowed upon it by the Act, going beyond its legal jurisdiction to excessively restrict the film industry, a move that manifestly violates the core principles of freedom of speech and ideas. It is important to remember that the Board's authority under the Act is limited to regulating the picture via certification.

The primary responsibility of the CFBC ought to be to guarantee that films that undergo a reasonable examination are granted the appropriate certificate for display. Nonetheless, the Central Board of Film Certification has often adopted a very dubious stance that goes against the fundamental right to free speech[16].

[J] CONCLUSION

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The free exchange of innovative ideas and thinking and the control of speech have always been at odds with one another. Censorship has been criticized too often, usually seeming like an inevitable reaction to low public morale supported by sociocultural and political temperaments. Furthermore, it has remained debatable how women are stereotypically portrayed in films, with many and varied interpretations of lewdness, objectification, and obscenity, to mention a few. Therefore, present research examined the strategies and actions used by Indian cinemas to tackle the censorship concerns and mechanisms implemented by the Board of Film Certification. The findings indicate that opinions on India's current censoring system are not all the same. Unquestionably, however, censorship must not be used as a tool to suppress or impede cinematic creativity; rather, it must be allowed the latitude it requires to be great and enduring. In the worst circumstances, "pre-censorship," which is much more harmful in democracies, shouldn't be a part of film censorship.

[13] Act 37 of 1952.
[14] Section 5(B), Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution, 1949.

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 1 2024 2582-5534

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